No further EU action on RSA citrus

European plant health authorities decide not to impose additional restrictions on imported citrus from South Africa

The European Standing Committee on Plant Health has decided not to impose further measures against South Africa, after recognising the EU Food and Veterinary Office's (FVO) recently published report on its deliberations over the South African citrus export season.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the committee in Brussels last week. According to sources in the South African citrus trade, the committee did voice concerns about the number of interceptions occurring, but opted not to take action for the time being.

"The EU's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) recent report on their audit carried out in South Africa earlier this year, was in the end pivotal and the improvements and measures of the South African Risk Management (RMS) recognised," said Deon Joubert, the South African Citrus Growers' Association's special envoy in Brussels.

The FVO report stated that the South African industry's Citrus Black Spot (CBS) risk management system has been rigorously and diligently applied.

"So the suspension of trade or closing of the market is not foreseen, but within three weeks the next Standing Committee will be convened," Joubert added. "It is important for South Africa to stick to our CBS processes and system to ensure we do not again get ourselves onto the agenda."

Bigger campaign

South Africa entered last week's meeting with a total of seven interceptions reported so far during the current export campaign.
During the meeting, two further interceptions were reported, bringing the total to nine compared with 12 at the same time last year.

Sources say this has occurred against the background of South Africa shipping significantly bigger volumes to Europe this season compared with last year.

Official import data shows that South Africa has shipped just short of 497,00 tonnes of citrus to the EU so far this season. Meanwhile, latest crop statistics show that the South African citrus export crop is now likely to reach 113.6m cartons compared with last year's 115.7m.

At 15.7m cartons, grapefruit will exceed last year's figure by more than a million cartons; lemons will be almost 2m cartons up at 14.3m cartons; navels will be about one million cartons down on last year; and Valencia oranges will be more or less the same as last year.

More importantly, the recent drop in the South African currency against the US dollar will increase earnings to US dollar markets significantly for exporters, while they will also benefit from the currency's slide against the British pound and the euro.

The rand's weak position is expected to continue because of what observers describe as inherent weaknesses in the South African economy.